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Virginia 'safe house' belies its description

By John McCaslin
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MORRISVILLE, Va. — The description by Soviet KGB agent Vitaly Yurchenko of the CIA "safe house" he claims was used to imprison him is partly correct.

Mr. Yurchenko was right when he described the place as part of a 500-acre subdivision, near a body of water, not far from Fredericksburg, on Virginia Route 17. He called it "Coventry," and so did the developers.

But the similarity ends there.

Mr. Yurchenko said the estate was surrounded by big buildings and laser beams and other security devices. One would assume, from Mr. Yurchenko's description, that he fled from a fortress.

But thick woods, not big buildings, surround the modern Colonial-style home in this wealthy subdivision where it is believed the Soviet defector was held for CIA and FBI debriefings.

If a sophisticated security system existed, it was not apparent to neighbors. The closest thing resembling lasers yesterday on the carefully manicured lot was a discarded wrapper that once contained a toy Mattel "animated radar screen."

Neighbors say they believe the house, worth an estimated \$300,000,

was the one Mr. Yurchenko described when he announced in a press conference Monday that he was returning to the Soviet Union.

The owner of the house had rented it out this summer to a lawyer, neighbors said. The lawyer reportedly did not live there but instead used it for other reasons.

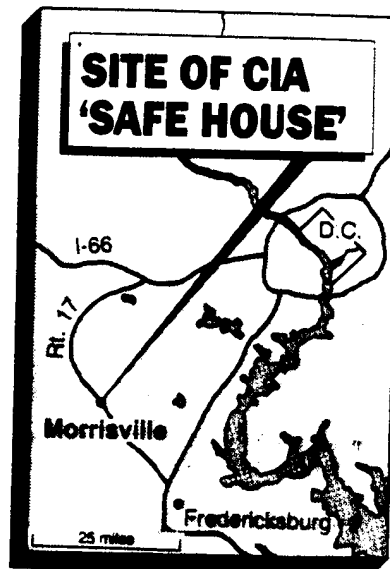
Its remoteness to Washington — just over an hour's drive — and its isolation made it an ideal spot for such interrogations.

The house was empty yesterday. Three "no trespassing" signs were nailed to trees at each entrance to the 10-acre estate, including a dock on the nearby shoreline of Lake Coventry.

Some of the contents of the home, visible through the few windows that weren't covered with blinds, seemed ordinary enough — several couches, end tables, lamps, a dining room table and china cabinet. In the carpeted basement, office furniture could be seen.

But unlike other homes, no personal touches were visible in any of the rooms. The walls were bare, as were the shelves of the china cabinet. There were no books or magazines on the end tables, only a black telephone. The home looked like it had never been occupied.

Fresh oil spots, however, could be seen on the cement floor of the ga-



Map by Terry E. Smith. The Washington Times

rage, where a vehicle recently had been parked. The lawn had just been mowed and, along the wooded driveway, a fallen tree had been cut in half. The heat was still on in the house, and two lights were left burning.

Whoever did reside here in recent months apparently liked to fish. A fishing pole and worm bucket rested against the back wall of the three-story home.

According to Mr. Yurchenko, six CIA agents kept him in isolation at the safe house, where he said he was drugged and denied the chance to communicate with Soviet representatives.

His charges were denied by the State Department and intelligence experts on Capitol Hill.